



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

REGION 8, MONTANA OFFICE  
FEDERAL BUILDING, 10 West 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 3200  
HELENA, MONTANA 59626

Ref: 8MO

February 21, 2008

Ms. June Bailey, Manager  
BLM Lewistown Field Office  
920 NE Main St., P.O. Box 1160  
Lewistown, MT 59457-1160

Re: CEQ # 20080030, Upper Missouri River Breaks  
National Monument Proposed Resource  
Management Plan (RMP) and Final EIS

Dear Ms. Bailey:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region VIII Montana Office has reviewed the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Resource Management Plan (RMP) and associated Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

The EPA appreciates receipt of responses to agency DEIS comments, as well as the several changes and/or additional information included in the RMP/FEIS in response to DEIS comments. We are pleased that the BLM identified their participation in the development, implementation and monitoring of water quality restoration plans and TMDLs in the RMP/FEIS (i.e., for watersheds in which BLM is a significant land manager or water user). We also appreciate inclusion of the many informative Appendices with the RMP/FEIS (e.g., Appendix H- Implementation and Monitoring, Appendix J- Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management; Appendix K- Best Management Practices; Appendix M- Watershed Planning Process; Appendix O- Oil and Gas Lease Stipulation and Conditions of Approval; Appendix X- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Concurrence).

We want to emphasize the importance of the need to give priority to protection of the unique natural resources, and biological, geological, and historic objects and values in the Monument wherever and whenever there may be conflicts between resource development and use and management activities with protection of these resources, objects and values. The only way the unique natural resources, objects, and values in the Monument can be protected and sustained for use and enjoyment by future generations over the long-term is to prioritize their protection in the face of increasing demands for resource development and use.

We are pleased that all motorized vehicles will be required to stay on roads within the Monument, and that under the preferred alternative 201 miles of BLM road segments would be closed to motorized travel. We remain concerned, however, that the preferred alternative would



continue to have a relatively high road density with 293 miles of roads open to motorized travel year long and 111 miles open seasonally, so that 216,700 acres of BLM land (or 58% of the Monument) would be within ½ mile of a designated open BLM road. We believe so many roads open to motorized travel has potential to adversely impact wildlife habitat and security, watersheds, water quality, fisheries, soil integrity, native plants, ecosystem functions, historic and cultural resources, and the remote, undeveloped and wild character of the Monument. Retention of so many roads open to motorized travel does not appear consistent with protection of the objects and resources within the Monument, particularly wildlife resources. Reductions in road density are an important component for improving ecological health and protecting wildlife. The EPA encourages the BLM to consider additional road closures/road removal in its preferred alternative to better restore and maintain critical big-game deer, elk and antelope habitat, and provide linkages between habitats, and thus, better protect the unique biological, geological, and cultural resources within the Monument for use and enjoyment by future generations.

We also want to emphasize the importance of adequate enforcement of travel restrictions to assure that motorized travel does not occur off roads or on closed roads. We remain concerned that motorized travel is causing erosion and habitat damage on environmentally sensitive lands, and this activity may not be adequately controlled through policing and enforcement due to budget limitations. There is a need to provide funding for an effective policing and enforcement program.

We are also concerned about the adequacy of resources for monitoring to implement an effective monitoring and adaptive management program. We note that one of the responses to our DEIS comments stated that impacts to ground water quality have not been identified as a result of oil and gas exploration, development and transport within the Monument, but also stated that BLM does not conduct ground water monitoring in association with oil and gas leases and/or transport of oil and gas products (page 682). It is not clear to us how BLM could identify potential impacts to ground water quality from any resource development activities if they were occurring, since no ground water monitoring is conducted.

While the FEIS states that oil production is not foreseen in the Monument, we note that if oil exploration and development were to occur, it would be important for BLM to conduct at least a limited amount of monitoring to verify that adverse impacts do not occur. It is important that impacts to any resource that may potentially be affected by management activities/uses be monitored. It is only through monitoring of actual environmental effects that occur that BLM will be able to determine whether: 1) RMP goals and objectives are being met; 2) assumptions/indicators used in developing and implementing the RMP are valid; 3) environmental effects are as predicted (i.e., addressing uncertainties); and 4) whether mitigation is effective or needs to be adjusted to meet RMP goals and objectives. Adaptive management cannot work unless adequate funds are provided to monitor and detect impacts from land management.

We also want to express concerns about the cumulative effects of oil and gas exploration and production activities on lands both within and adjacent to the Monument. Cumulative

effects of oil and gas exploration and production activities should be evaluated within ecosystems, regardless of land ownership, to assure that overall cumulative ecological effects do not exceed ecological protection thresholds. Activities within the Monument may need to be reduced in recognition of increased impacts from activities outside the Monument. We also believe the threshold for "acceptable impacts" and "adequacy of mitigation" should be set higher within a National Monument than on other BLM lands in order to assure that the objects and natural resources identified in the Proclamation are fully protected (i.e., only minimal environmental impacts should be considered "acceptable," and mitigation should have a higher standard for effectiveness within a National Monument).

The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review and comment during the NEPA review process for the RMP/EIS. If you have any questions please contact Mr. Steve Potts of my staff in Helena at (406) 457-5022 or in Missoula at 406-329-3313.

Sincerely,

/s/ John F. Wardell  
Director  
Montana Office

cc: Larry Svoboda/Julia Johnson, EPA 8EPR-N, Denver

